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English for Specific Purposes Needs Analysis in Entrepreneurship Education: A Gap Analysis Index Approach to Bridging Specialized Linguistic Competencies and Labor Market Demands in Algerian Higher Education

Mohamed Sallaye*
Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Linguistics, Literature and Translation, University of Malaga, Spain
mohamed.sallaye@uma.es

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) needs of student entrepreneurs operating under Algeria's Ministerial Decision No. 1275, which institutionalizes startup project development within university graduation requirements. Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study surveyed N = 120 student entrepreneurs across two Algerian university incubators using a 40-item Present Situation Analysis (PSA) questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews with eight ecosystem stakeholders to establish Target Situation Analysis (TSA) priorities. Quantitative results revealed severe self-assessed deficiencies across all five communicative domains, with Investor Pitching registering the lowest competency (M = 1.42, SD = 0.47, α = .93) and Digital and Marketing Communication the highest (M = 2.62, SD = 0.67, α = .95). A novel Gap Analysis Index (GAI = TSA Mean Rank × 5 − PSA Mean) identified Investor Pitching (GAI = 21.08) and Strategic Business Documentation (GAI = 16.26) as the most urgent intervention domains. Thematic analysis generated four dominant themes-Investor Communication Deficiency, Weak Business Writing Skills, Digital Communication Limitations, and Intercultural Challenges-substantiated by a deviant case. Spearman correlations confirmed that prior English training and incubator duration were associated with reduced competency gaps. The study proposes a three-module, task-based ESP curriculum directly informed by the GAI ranking, contributing theoretically, methodologically, and pedagogically to ESP-for-entrepreneurship research in Algerian higher education.*

KEYWORDS: English for Specific Purposes, Needs Analysis, Gap Analysis Index, Entrepreneurship Education, Algerian Higher Education, Ministerial Decision 1275, Task-Based Language Teaching.

* Corresponding author
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1. Introduction

1.1 Context: The Algerian Entrepreneurial University Reform

Algeria's Ministerial Decision No. 1275 formally integrated startup project development into the graduation framework of Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral students, requiring multidisciplinary student teams to develop innovation-driven ventures within university business incubators as an alternative or complement to the traditional graduation thesis (Khoualed et al., 2024). This reform has generated an entrepreneurial ecosystem in which student ventures are evaluated on dimensions including Business Model Canvas (BMC) articulation, investor pitch delivery, and market viability-communicative events increasingly conducted, at least partially, in English given the international orientation of accelerators, grant bodies, and investor networks. The reform's mandatory training curriculum explicitly includes communication and negotiation techniques and digital marketing modules, domains in which English-medium competence functions as a practical, though largely unaddressed, prerequisite.

1.2 Problematization

Despite this structural transformation, English language instruction in Algerian higher education has not been systematically redesigned to meet entrepreneurial communicative demands. The present study was motivated by recurring evidence from incubator evaluation committees that student entrepreneurs-technically proficient in their respective domains-consistently underperform in English-medium investor interactions. This study moves beyond anecdote to systematically document this phenomenon through a formal needs analysis combining quantitative self-assessment data from student entrepreneurs with qualitative stakeholder testimony from across the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

1.3 Research Gap

No published study has combined a quantitative, domain-structured Present Situation Analysis (PSA) instrument with a Target Situation Analysis (TSA) forced-ranking elicitation procedure across a comparably diverse stakeholder panel (institutional, pedagogical, financial, and international) within the Algerian Ministerial Decision No. 1275 context, nor formally computed a Gap Analysis Index integrating both data streams to prioritize ESP curriculum design. This study addresses that gap directly.

1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What are the present English communicative competency profiles (PSA) of student entrepreneurs in Algerian university incubators?

RQ2: What communicative competencies do ecosystem stakeholders (TSA) identify as priorities for startup success, and how do these priorities rank?

RQ3: What is the magnitude and structure of the PSA–TSA gap, as quantified by the GAI, and what does this imply for ESP curriculum design?

H_1: Prior English training and incubator participation duration are positively associated with self-assessed entrepreneurial English competency.

H_2: A statistically significant mismatch exists between student self-assessed competency (PSA) and stakeholder-assigned priority (TSA) across the five communicative domains.

H_3: The magnitude of this mismatch, as measured by the GAI, varies significantly across domains, with oral/interactive domains (pitching) showing the highest gap severity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ESP and the Needs Analysis Tradition

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) established needs analysis as ESP's constitutive epistemological foundation, formalized through the complementary lenses of Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA). Munby's (1978) Communicative Needs Processor and subsequent refinements by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and West (1994) established the methodological precedent of triangulating learner self-report with external stakeholder judgment-precisely the architecture this study operationalizes. Hyland and Kevin (2021) and Dou et al. (2023) confirm that contemporary ESP needs analysis has grown increasingly multidimensional, a trend this study extends through the GAI's formal quantitative-qualitative integration.

2.2 ESP in Entrepreneurship Contexts

Constantinou (2026) demonstrated that entrepreneurship-enriched ESP instruction at the Cyprus University of Technology improved speaking proficiency and transversal competence, while identifying oral presentation as the most resistant skill to improvement-a finding directly consistent with this study's identification of Investor Pitching as the domain of greatest deficiency. Tuzlukova and Heckadon (2020) and Fallah et al. (2022) similarly document the value of entrepreneurship-integrated ESP, though neither study formally quantifies the PSA-TSA gap via a composite index. Benali Reguieg (2025), investigating Algerian startup holders at Chlef University, reported significant deficiencies in pitching and business planning consistent with this study's findings, though her single-instrument, single-institution design lacked the present study's TSA triangulation.

2.3 Communicative Competence, Genre Systems, and Activity Theory

Canale and Swain's (1980) strategic competence dimension-the capacity to manage communication breakdown under pressure-directly explains the qualitative theme of linguistic anxiety identified in this study's interview data. Genre Systems Theory (Bazerman, 1994) frames the investor pitch, BMC, and executive summary as an interdependent genre system rather than isolated skills, motivating this study's integrated three-module curriculum design. Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) situates ESP development within the incubator's socially mediated activity system, consistent with multiple experts' emphasis on simulation-based, contextually embedded training over decontextualized grammar instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was employed: quantitative PSA data were collected and analyzed first (Phase 1), followed by qualitative TSA/LSA data collection (Phase 2) to explain and contextualize quantitative patterns, with both streams integrated through the Gap Analysis Index (Phase 3).

3.2 Participants

Phase 1 (Quantitative): N = 120 student entrepreneurs enrolled in university business incubators under Ministerial Decision No. 1275 at the University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed and the University of Annaba. The sample comprised 62 male (51.7%) and 58 female (48.3%) participants, aged 21–26 years (M = 23.3, SD = 1.1). Disciplinary distribution: Engineering/Technology (n = 50, 41.7%), Economics/Management (n = 48, 40.0%), Other fields (n = 10, 8.3%), and Social Sciences (n = 12, 10.0%). Academic level was concentrated at M2 (n = 65, 54.2%), with L3 (n = 18), M1 (n = 18), and PhD (n = 19) comprising the remainder. Incubator participation duration was fairly evenly distributed (less than 3 months: n = 41; 3–6 months: n = 43; more than 6 months: n = 36), and 84 participants (70.0%) reported no prior specialized English training, while 36 (30.0%) had received some.

Phase 2 (Qualitative): Eight purposively sampled stakeholders representing distinct vantage points within the entrepreneurial ecosystem: an incubator director (University of Oran 2, 4 years' experience), a venture coach (3 years), an ESP instructor (6 years), an angel investor/venture capital liaison, an international incubator consultant, a technical coach (University of Annaba), a curriculum specialist in language engineering, and a practicing student entrepreneur offering a dissenting perspective on the centrality of English.

3.3 Instruments

PSA Questionnaire: A 40-item instrument comprising eight demographic/background items and 35 Likert-scale items (1 = Very Low to 5 = Very High) distributed across five seven-item domains: Investor Pitching and Oral Communication, Strategic Business Documentation, Specialized Entrepreneurial Vocabulary, Digital and Marketing Communication, and Cross-Cultural Communication and Negotiation, plus five additional Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) items.

TSA/LSA Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: A five-section guide (Background; Core Communication Needs; Task and Genre Requirements; Digital and Intercultural Skills; Evaluation and Recommendations) concluding with a forced-ranking item requiring each stakeholder to rank the five communicative domains from 5 (most important) to 1 (least important) for startup success.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively (means, standard deviations) and inferentially (Spearman's rank correlation, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis H). Internal consistency was assessed via Cronbach's Alpha. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis

procedure. The TSA Mean Rank for each domain was computed by averaging the eight experts' forced rankings; this was integrated with PSA means via the formula GAI = (TSA Mean Rank × 5) − PSA Mean.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results: Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability for the Five PSA Domains (N = 120)

Domain	M	SD	Cronbach's α	Proficiency Level
Investor Pitching & Oral Communication	1.42	0.47	.925	Very Low
Strategic Business Documentation	1.87	0.47	.916	Very Low
Cross-Cultural Communication & Negotiation	2.20	0.65	.959	Low
Specialized Entrepreneurial Vocabulary	2.54	0.69	.977	Low
Digital & Marketing Communication	2.62	0.67	.954	Moderate (borderline)

Note. Scale interpretation follows Alkharusi (2022): 1.00–1.80 = Very Low; 1.81–2.61 = Low; 2.62–3.42 = Moderate. All five domain means fall at or below the moderate threshold, indicating a systemic competency deficit. All Cronbach's Alpha values substantially exceed the .70 acceptability threshold (Babbie, 2013); values above .90-while indicating excellent internal consistency-also warrant the cautionary observation, addressed in Section 6, that item redundancy within domains may be partially inflating these coefficients.

Investor Pitching emerged as the domain of most severe self-assessed deficiency (M = 1.42), followed by Strategic Business Documentation (M = 1.87). Notably, even the least deficient domain, Digital and Marketing Communication (M = 2.62), sits only marginally within the "Moderate" band, underscoring that no communicative domain currently meets professional adequacy from students' own perspective.

4.2 Inferential Statistics: Testing H_1

Table 2. Spearman Correlations: Incubator Duration and Prior Training with Domain Competency

Domain	ρ (Duration)	p	ρ (Training)	p
Investor Pitching	−.220	.016*	.423	<.001**
Business Documentation	.062	.501 (ns)	.339	<.001**
Specialized Vocabulary	.285	.002**	.314	<.001**
Digital & Marketing	.256	.005**	.315	<.001**
Cross-Cultural Negotiation	.175	.056 (ns)	.503	<.001**

Prior English training showed a robust, statistically significant positive association with competency across all five domains (ρ = .31–.50, all $p < .001$), providing strong support for H_1's training component. Incubator duration showed a more selective pattern: significant positive associations with Vocabulary (ρ = .285) and

Digital Communication (ρ = .256), a significant negative association with Investor Pitching (ρ = −.220, p = .016), and non-significant associations with Business Documentation and Cross-Cultural Negotiation.

Kruskal-Wallis tests confirmed significant field-of-study effects on Investor Pitching (H = 16.63, p < .001), Specialized Vocabulary (H = 67.31, p < .001), and Cross-Cultural Negotiation (H = 44.39, p < .001). Engineering/Technology students reported the highest Digital and Marketing competency (M = 3.05) among all fields, while Social Sciences students reported the lowest Business Documentation competency (M = 1.30). Gender showed no significant effect on Investor Pitching competency (Mann-Whitney U = 1776.5, p = .910; Male M = 1.39, Female M = 1.44).

4.3 Qualitative Results: Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

Thematic analysis of the eight interview transcripts, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure, generated four dominant themes.

Theme 1: Investor Communication Deficiency. Experts consistently identified spontaneous investor Q&A as the domain of most acute failure. As the incubator director observed, students "freeze" when investors interrupt rehearsed pitches with unexpected questions, losing persuasive capacity not from technical incompetence but from insufficient linguistic flexibility to construct a coherent answer in real time.

Theme 2: Weak Business Writing Skills. Participants described a specific deficit in genre knowledge-the structural and rhetorical conventions of executive summaries and business plans-rather than general writing weakness. The venture coach noted that students conflate financial and marketing terminology, producing an impression of unprofessionalism that undermines partner confidence.

Theme 3: Digital Communication Limitations. Despite being "digital natives," students were reported to lack mastery of professional email register and netiquette, oscillating between excessive formality and inappropriate casualness-a finding the ESP instructor explicitly linked to the absence of any digital genre instruction in current curricula.

Theme 4: Intercultural Challenges. Multiple experts, particularly the incubator director and international consultant, described a rhetorical mismatch between Algerian students' culturally inherited preference for elaborated, indirect framing (attributed to Arabic/French rhetorical norms) and the direct, results-oriented communicative style expected by Anglo-Saxon investors.

Expert 8: A practicing student entrepreneur qualified the dominant narrative, reporting that for ventures targeting domestic or Francophone markets, English communicative demands were comparatively secondary; this participant nonetheless ranked Investor Pitching as the single highest priority overall (5/5), while ranking Cross-Cultural Communication lowest-illustrating that even dissenting voices converged on oral pitching competency as paramount, while diverging sharply on the relative urgency of intercultural and other domains.

4.4 Integrated Analysis: The Gap Analysis Index (GAI)

Table 3. TSA Mean Rank (N = 8 Experts) and Computed Gap Analysis Index

Domain	PSA Mean	TSA Mean Rank	GAI = (TSA×5) − PSA	Gap Severity
Investor Pitching	1.42	4.500	21.08	Extreme
Strategic Business Documentation	1.87	3.625	16.26	Severe
Specialized Vocabulary	2.54	2.875	11.84	Moderate
Cross-Cultural Negotiation	2.20	2.000	7.80	Low-Moderate
Digital & Marketing Communication	2.62	2.000	7.38	Low-Moderate

The GAI ranking confirms H_2 and H_3: Investor Pitching combines both the lowest PSA proficiency and the highest TSA priority rank (4.50 of a possible 5.00, with 6 of 8 experts assigning it the maximum rank of 5), yielding by far the highest GAI score and confirming it as the unambiguous top intervention priority. Strategic Business Documentation occupies a clear second position. Notably, Cross-Cultural Negotiation and Digital Communication, despite registering among the lower PSA proficiency scores, receive comparatively low TSA priority (mean rank = 2.00 for both), producing GAI scores roughly one-third the magnitude of Pitching's-a finding that would have been invisible to a PSA-only deficiency ranking, and which is interpreted theoretically in Section 5.

5. Discussion

5.1 Why Investor Pitching Dominates the Gap Profile

The convergence of extreme self-assessed deficiency (M = 1.42, the lowest of all domains) with near-unanimous stakeholder prioritization (6 of 8 experts ranking it 5/5) positions Investor Pitching as a crisis-level intervention priority, fully consistent with Constantinou's (2026) finding that oral presentation resists improvement even under enriched ESP instruction. The qualitative data explain this severity through Canale and Swain's (1980) strategic competence construct: experts repeatedly distinguished between rehearsed delivery (adequate) and spontaneous Q&A defense (severely deficient), indicating that the deficit is not lexical or grammatical but interactional and improvisational-a competence dimension general English instruction, focused on receptive and planned-production skills, structurally cannot develop.

The counterintuitive negative correlation between incubator duration and Pitching competency ($\rho = -.220$, $p = .016$) merits careful, non-dismissive interpretation. Rather than indicating that incubator experience harms pitching ability, this pattern more plausibly reflects a selection or exposure effect: students with longer incubator tenure face more frequent, higher-stakes pitching demands (international competitions, investor rounds) that expose linguistic limitations invisible to less-experienced peers who have not yet faced equivalent pressure-consistent with the international consultant's observation that spontaneous interactive phases reveal deficits that rehearsed contexts mask. This interpretation is offered as a plausible explanation rather than a confirmed causal mechanism, given the cross-sectional design's inherent limits (Section 7).

5.2 The Theoretical Significance of the GAI's Non-Obvious Findings

The GAI's most theoretically important contribution lies precisely in the domains it deprioritizes relative to raw PSA deficiency: Cross-Cultural Negotiation, despite a low PSA mean (2.20), receives a comparatively modest GAI (7.80) because stakeholders rank it only fourth in priority on average-even though qualitative testimony (Theme 4) treats intercultural mismatch as conceptually significant. This apparent tension is resolved through Genre Systems Theory (Bazerman, 1994): intercultural competence functions less as a standalone curricular module than as a pragmatic overlay distributed across the pitching and documentation genres rather than a discrete skill domain warranting independent instructional time-explaining why expert rankings, even while describing intercultural failures vividly in open-ended responses, do not translate this into top-tier forced-ranking priority. This distinction between thematic salience and ranked priority is a methodological insight the GAI makes visible that thematic analysis alone would not.

5.3 Disciplinary Variation and Activity Theory

The significant field-of-study effects (Section 4.2) are well explained through Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987): Engineering students' superior Digital and Marketing competency (M = 3.05) likely reflects their activity system's denser embedding in English-medium technical platforms (GitHub, technical documentation, developer communities), while Social Sciences students' weaker Business Documentation competency (M = 1.30) may reflect comparatively less disciplinary exposure to quantitative, results-oriented genres prior to incubator entry. This pattern suggests ESP curriculum delivery may benefit from partial disciplinary differentiation rather than a strictly uniform module sequence-a refinement to the curriculum proposed in Section 6.

5.4 The Deviant Case and the Limits of the English-Priority Narrative

The deviant case (Expert 8) performs a critical function consistent with rigorous qualitative practice: it prevents over-generalization of the English-centrality narrative by foregrounding that, for ventures with primarily domestic or Francophone market orientation, English communicative demand is conditional on market scope rather than universal. Tellingly, even this dissenting voice ranked Investor Pitching as the top priority-suggesting the GAI's identification of Pitching as the most urgent domain is robust even under a skeptical reading of English's overall importance, while its treatment of Cross-Cultural Communication as lowest priority (rank = 1) is idiosyncratic to this respondent's domestic-market orientation and should not be read as undermining Theme 4's broader validity across internationally oriented ventures.

6. Implications

6.1 Pedagogical Implications: A GAI-Sequenced ESP Curriculum

Directly informed by the GAI ranking (Table 3), a three-module task-based curriculum is proposed with time allocation proportional to gap severity.

Module 1-Pitching and Spontaneous Q&A Defense (40% of instructional time; GAI = 21.08). Centered on live, unscripted investor-panel simulation explicitly targeting the rehearsed-vs-spontaneous

gap identified in Theme 1, using authentic pitch recordings for genre analysis followed by escalating-difficulty mock Q&A under time pressure.

Module 2-Strategic Business Documentation (35%; GAI = 16.26). Genre-based instruction (Swales, 1990) in executive summary and BMC writing, explicitly targeting the terminology-conflation problem identified by the venture coach (Theme 2), with disciplinary-differentiated material given the Section 5.3 field-of-study findings.

Module 3-Integrated Vocabulary, Digital, and Intercultural Competence (25%; combined GAI = 27.02 across three lower-priority domains). Rather than three separate modules, the comparatively lower and similar GAI scores for Vocabulary, Digital Communication, and Cross-Cultural Negotiation justify their integration into a single combined module, consistent with the Genre Systems interpretation in Section 5.2 that intercultural and digital competence function as pragmatic overlays rather than standalone skills.

6.2 Institutional Implications

Incubator training calendars should formally schedule live pitch simulations with real investor panels, operationalizing experts' repeated calls for "simulation-based" rather than "academic" training (Themes 1–3), and should track pitching performance longitudinally given the unexpected duration effect identified in Section 5.1.

6.3 Policy Implications

These findings provide Algeria's MESRS with an evidence base for mandating ESP-for-entrepreneurship as a curricular requirement distinct from general English within the Ministerial Decision No. 1275 framework, prioritized according to the empirically derived GAI sequence rather than uniform allocation across all five domains.

7. Limitations

This study's sample, while adequately powered (N = 120), is drawn from two institutions (University of Oran 2 and University of Annaba), limiting generalizability to incubators in other Algerian regions. The PSA instrument's self-report nature introduces potential social desirability or self-assessment bias, for which no independent observational measure was collected in this phase. The unusually high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (.92–.98) across domains, while exceeding conventional reliability thresholds, also raise the possibility of item redundancy within each seven-item domain (i.e., items may be tapping a single global "confidence" factor rather than discriminating finer sub-skills); a confirmatory factor analysis in future work would clarify this. The qualitative sample (n = 8), though deliberately diverse across institutional, financial, pedagogical, and practitioner perspectives, cannot claim thematic saturation with the same confidence a larger qualitative sample would provide. Finally, the cross-sectional design precludes causal interpretation of the Duration–Pitching relationship discussed in Section 5.1; a longitudinal design is required to disambiguate selection effects from genuine skill trajectories.

8. Conclusion

This study has produced an empirically grounded, theoretically integrated needs analysis of English for Specific Purposes in Algerian entrepreneurship education, combining a 120-respondent PSA survey with an eight-stakeholder TSA interview panel through a novel Gap Analysis Index. The GAI identifies Investor Pitching (GAI = 21.08) and Strategic Business Documentation (GAI = 16.26) as the two domains of greatest curricular urgency-a finding robust across both the dominant qualitative narrative and its deliberately solicited deviant case. Theoretically, the study extends Dudley-Evans and St John's (1998) ESP framework into a policy-driven entrepreneurship ecosystem and demonstrates the GAI's capacity to reveal non-obvious prioritization patterns (notably, the comparative de-prioritization of Cross-Cultural Negotiation despite its low absolute proficiency) that neither PSA nor TSA data alone would surface. Pedagogically, the proposed GAI-sequenced three-module curriculum offers Algerian higher education institutions an immediately actionable, evidence-based response to the documented gap. Future research should pursue the longitudinal and confirmatory-factor-analytic extensions identified in Section 7 to further substantiate and refine these findings.

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